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A Survey of Developments in Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine by the  
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**UKRAINE BEGINS TO DEAL SERIOUSLY WITH SOVIET PAST.** On 12-13  
February,

Ukraine held for the first time parliamentary hearings on the question of the famine of 1932-33 that led to the deaths of between 3 million and 7 million people. The hearings were held in accordance with a resolution passed by the Verkhovna Rada on 28 November 2002.

President Kuchma first suggested at the annual convention of the Federation of Trade Unions on 21 October 1997 that the annual anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, 7 November, be transformed into a day of understanding and reconciliation. Such a step, he suggested, should be undertaken by the Verkhovna Rada. The legislature, then headed by Oleksandr Moroz, with the largest faction being Communist, turned down the draft law establishing 28 November as an annual day of understanding and reconciliation.

Left-wing factions were removed from control of parliament only in early 2000 when the center and national democrats united for the first and only time. At this time, communist symbols on the Verkhovna Rada were finally removed, though a statue of Vladimir

Lenin still stands in Kyiv – one of 500 still standing primarily outside Western Ukraine.

Ukraine has long held an ambivalent attitude toward its Soviet past. Until now, only a small monument to the famine has existed in Kyiv next to the rebuilt Mykhaylyvskyy Sobor. A presidential decree dated 28 November 2002 supported the call by the Ukrainian diaspora to build a far bigger monument to the famine in central Kyiv on the 70th anniversary of the famine this year. The new monument will be part of a Famine Memorial Complex housing a museum and research center.

Ukraine's ambivalent attitude toward the Soviet past rests upon its three-way division of political forces in Ukraine. National democrats have long held negative views of the Soviet past and what they call its crimes against humanity, such as the famine and Stalinist terror. National democrats, whose primary base is in western-central Ukraine, hold analogous views to their counterparts in the Baltic states that Soviet rule was an occupation by foreign, i.e., Russian, forces. According to the national democrats, Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, is therefore guilty of Soviet crimes. During Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Ukraine in January to attend the CIS summit and to begin the Year of Russia in Ukraine, he and Russian Ambassador Viktor Chernomyrdin were asked by journalists if Russia would pay compensation to the famine victims along the lines undertaken by Germany after World War II. They refused to consider the matter.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Communist Party (KPU) acknowledged only as late as 1990 that a famine had even taken place. At that time, Social Democratic Party-united (SDPU-o) parliamentary faction leader and former President Leonid Kravchuk was in charge of communist ideology and propaganda. Many of today's "political scientists," such as Deputy Prime Minister Dmytro

Tabachnyk, lectured on Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet era and wrote articles condemning the diaspora for raising events such as the 1932-33 famine.

The KPU was banned in August 1991 and then a new KPU was allowed to register in October 1993. During the Verkhovna Rada hearings on the famine, KPU leader Petro Symonenko denied that the famine was artificial and blamed it on disastrous weather conditions, low harvests in 1931-32, the pre-Soviet agricultural heritage, and local mismanagement.

Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz argued that Soviet Ukraine reunited Ukrainian territories and, in contrast to the tsarist regime, it at least recognized Ukrainians as a separate ethnic group. The Socialists blame Stalinism for crimes committed in Ukraine, not Soviet rule as such. Such a view is similar to that espoused by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

What has held up Ukraine's investigation of Soviet crimes against humanity the most has been the centrist camp, which hails from the top levels of the pre-1991 KPU. In 1990-1991, the KPU began to split into "sovereign-national communists" and "imperial communists." In the 1990s, sovereign-national communists evolved into centrist oligarchs who first appeared as political parties in the 1998 elections.

The attitude of centrists is the most confusing, as they, unlike national democrats, refuse to condemn the Soviet regime as a whole, perhaps understandably, as they are themselves a product of that very same regime. Since Kuchma faced Symonenko in the 1999 presidential elections and used the "Red Scare" to encourage Ukrainians to vote for him to thwart a Communist comeback, centrists have been comfortable attacking Soviet crimes against humanity. In this, they hold similar views as the national democrats that the famine was a "genocide" on a par with the Nazi Holocaust. During the

Verkhovna Rada hearings, centrist and former parliamentary speaker Ivan Plyushch blamed the "cruel and godless Bolshevik regime" for the famine.

At the same time, the center disagrees with the national democrats over whom to blame for Soviet crimes. Centrists blame Marxist-Leninist ideology and Stalinism for crimes, including the famine, not Russians. Both centrists and national democrats see the famine as directed against Ukrainians.

The timing of the Verkhovna Rada hearings remains suspicious. On the one hand, Kuchma undoubtedly wanted to deal with the issue early in the year, as it may cause difficulties with the Year of Russia in Ukraine. National democrats have already complained that the Year of Russia in Ukraine should not be held in the same year as the 70th anniversary of the famine.

The hearings also took place a month before planned opposition protests. In his November decree, Kuchma sought to inflame the already difficult relations between Our Ukraine and the KPU by putting them to yet another test. Our Ukraine has refused to join any joint opposition platform with the KPU and has only agreed to cooperate with the Socialists and the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc.

A final factor is next year's presidential elections. With stable popularity ratings over the last three years of 25-30 percent, Yushchenko will inevitably advance to a second round. If he faces Symonenko, Ukraine would have a rerun of the 1999 elections, but this time pro-Kuchma centrists would be forced to rally behind national democrat Yushchenko. If Yushchenko faces a pro-Kuchma centrist, the KPU will back the centrist oligarch and thereby repeat their tactics in April 2001 when they voted with the centrists to remove the Yushchenko government.

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